



OPENING STATEMENT

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**Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX)
House Homeland Security Committee**

Worldwide Threats and Homeland Security Challenges

Remarks as Prepared

Good morning. I'd like to thank our witnesses for joining us and for offering their insights on the security challenges we face at home and abroad. We will cover a lot of ground today—from America's border security to our cyber defenses—but I want to focus in particular on the rising terror threat to the homeland.

Last month, this Committee held the first-ever Congressional hearing at the 9/11 Memorial Museum in New York. And on hallowed ground, we were reminded of the solemn pledge our country made in the aftermath: to never let such a day happen again. That resolve became the rallying cry of this nation as we embarked on a generational war against Islamist terror.

Fourteen years later, we are still engaged in that struggle, and today I expect an unvarnished assessment from our witnesses about where we stand in the fight.

We are at a turning point in a new age of terror. I predict this year could exceed the last to become the most violent year on record for global terrorism. Radical Islamists are recruiting online, across borders, and at broadband speed—and the impact is being felt worldwide. Here in the United States, there have been more terrorist cases this year involving homegrown jihadists than any full year since 9/11.

ISIS alone has inspired or directed 17 terrorist plots in America since early 2014, and overall the group has been linked to more than 60 plots against Western targets, from Canada to Australia. This pace of terror plotting is unprecedented—unrivaled even by al Qaeda at its peak. Yet we are no closer to dismantling ISIS than we were a year ago.

Despite 14 months of airstrikes, the group has largely maintained its core safe haven while expanding its global footprint. The ISIS reign of terror is fueled by its recruitment of foreign fighters, who hail from more than 100 countries, including our own.

This Committee launched a bipartisan task force to examine the foreign fighter threat, and last month the group released its final report with some very disturbing findings. Overall, they found that we are losing the struggle to stop Americans from traveling overseas to join jihadists.

We have only managed to stop a small fraction of the hundreds of Americans who have attempted to fight in Syria and Iraq, and some have even managed to make it back into the United States after enlisting with terrorist groups. We are falling behind the threat for many reasons.

Vulnerable young people are being recruited at record speeds, and terrorists are shifting their communications to “dark space,” which has made it far more difficult to monitor and intercept suspects. These secure communication tools are also being used to plot attacks in our country.

Moreover, gaping security weaknesses overseas—especially in Europe—are making it easier for extremists to travel to and from the conflict zone. But at the end of the day, we cannot keep individuals from being lured to terrorist hotspots unless we eliminate the problem at the source.

Sadly, those prospects have grown darker. The President’s failure to develop a coherent strategy in Syria and Iraq has emboldened our adversaries to fill the vacuum, with disastrous consequences.

Russia and Iran are now propping up Assad, and there are reports that even Cuban special forces have joined the fight. These rogue regimes will fan the flames of sectarianism and make it harder for us to eliminate the terrorist sanctuary in the region. Their actions will also intensify refugee flows, which have become a serious security challenge in light of reports that terrorists are exploiting the crisis to sneak operatives into the West.

Violent extremists are also expanding their foothold from Libya to Afghanistan, yet I am alarmed that we lack a clear vision for reversing their gains and winning the wider war against Islamist terror. If we fail to defeat our enemies overseas and combat their hateful ideology, we will be forced to fight more of them here at home. We have learned this the hard way.

Today I hope to hear from our witnesses about these challenges and how their agencies are working to strengthen our defenses on the homefront.

I want to express my gratitude to each of you for your close and continuing cooperation with this Committee, your dedication to country, and your successes this year in disrupting terrorist threats against the American people.

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